

# The Jekyll & Hyde Years — Or How To Live With A Teenager

A parent tells the story of how her wonderful daughter was switched with a horrible monster when she became a teenager. In time, the error was discovered and the monster was replaced with a wonderful grown woman. If this sounds strangely like the adolescent in your home, you may be wondering if there's any hope of living happily ever after under the same roof with your teen. There is, and the following insights may help you understand the changes you are both going through.

## Developmental Changes

Normal teenage development involves both internal and external conflict as teens test their boundaries, search for independence and try out their ideas in the world. They are a bundle of nerves and hormones struggling to be grown up. Sometimes they act in rebellious ways and sometimes in childlike ways that are hard to understand and even harder to live with.

## A Parent's Role

It is hard to stand by and watch your teen struggle. But as a parent, you must learn to strike a balance between letting go and holding on. Making mistakes and experiencing pain, disappointment and anger are all a part of growing up. Being too protective doesn't help your teen become an independent adult. If you treat your teen with respect and help him or her build and keep self-esteem, you will have gone a long way in helping your teen through a difficult journey. You must show your love, especially when your teen doesn't love him or herself, and you need to always try to keep a positive attitude.

## When to Seek Help

It can be difficult to determine if the problems your teen is experiencing are a natural part of growing up or if professional help is needed. If your child exhibits any of these signs, consider seeking professional counseling:

- Suffers from prolonged depression
- Continually makes negative statements
- Exhibits excessive anger
- Talks about suicide
- Has a drastic change in personality, appetite or friends
- Has lost interest in school

Your Employee Assistance Program can help. In some cases, family consultation is recommended. Because of the fear of drug use or suicide, quick action should be taken if you see marked deterioration in your teen's attitude or appearance.

## Positive Techniques for Coping

Peers will have a great influence on your teen, so make a point of meeting his or her friends and encouraging wholesome activities. Be available to talk, but avoid

being judgmental. Let your child stumble a few times when on the road to independence, but be sure you are there if your teen should fall. Teach your teen responsible behavior in the first place to avoid making dangerous mistakes. Be generous with your praise when you approve, but try to hold your tongue when you disapprove, unless you fear your teen will be harmed.

The Jekyll & Hyde years are few, yet it may feel like forever and a day before they pass. But pass they will and who knows, you may find yourself reminiscing about those days when there was never a dull moment.

### **Remember . . .**

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available to you and your eligible dependents 24 hours a day, seven days a week. All services are confidential and provided at no cost to you. As part of your EAP, you now have access to MagellanAssist. Visit today at <http://www.dpa.ca.gov/benefits/other/eap/Assist.shtm>

## Talking To Teens: Important Phrases To Be Used At Least Once A Day

**Thank you.** It's important to acknowledge your teen's efforts to help you or others. You might say: "Thanks for setting the table; I got the salad made while you were doing that" or "Thanks for putting your dirty clothes in the hamper." Saying 'thank you' communicates that you have seen and appreciate what your teen is doing. Your teen is much more likely to try to please you if you acknowledge his or her contributions.

**Tell me more.** Words like these show your teen that you are listening and that you would like to hear more about what's on his or her mind. "Tell me more" encourages conversation without passing judgment or giving immediate advice—two responses that discourage further communication from your teenager.

**You can do it.** Your expression of confidence in your teen's ability to do things without your help is important. There will be many times when your encouragement will mean the difference between giving up on a challenging task or seeing it through.

**How can I help?** Let your teenager know you are willing and available to help him or her accomplish a particular task that may be difficult to manage alone.

**Please.** After all these years, "please" is still a classic. When you ask a favor of anyone, saying please acknowledges that you are asking for something that will help you and/or make you happy. And don't forget to say "thank you" when the job is done. Instilling courtesy and teaching good manners will benefit your teen throughout his or her entire life.

**Good job.** Self-respect and self-confidence grow when your teenager's efforts and performance are rewarded. Whenever possible, give your teen lots of praise, but be sure your praise is honest and specific.

**It's time to...** "It's time to get ready for bed," or "do homework," or "turn off the TV." All children, no matter their age, need structure in their daily lives to provide a measure of security in an often insecure world. It is up to you as a parent to establish and maintain a workable schedule of activities, always remembering that even teens can benefit from regular mealtimes and bedtimes.

**I love you.** Everyone needs love and affection and a feeling of acceptance and belonging. Don't assume that your teenagers know and understand that you love them. Tell them.

*Excerpts taken from Parlay International and Our Children Magazine, March 1999*